

AMHERST REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
March 10, 2010

LOCATION: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Coull, Aaron Hayden, Lawrence Kelley, Margaret Roberts, Jeanne Traester

OTHERS PRESENT: Tom Milligan and Joyce Hatch (UMass), Scott Merzbach (Daily Hampshire Gazette), Walter Wolnik, Jonathan O’Keeffe (Planning Board), David Williams, Kyle Wilson, Felicity Hardee, Judy Seacrest, L. Michael Alpert

STAFF PRESENT: Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director)

The meeting was called to order at 7:26 p.m.

Minutes

Mr. Hayden Moved to approve the minutes of February 24, 2010. Ms. Roberts seconded, and the Motion passed unanimously (5-0)

Appearance

Mr. Shaffer introduced the Gateway project and Vice-Chancellors Milligan and Hatch. Mr. Milligan spoke of the ongoing modest increase in student enrollment and population, the university’s aging residence hall infrastructure and the need to produce new student housing to replace the residence halls. He said UMass was interested in cooperating with the Town on this project, which would bring students closer to campus. He indicated that studies had shown that students that were more closely involved in campus activities tended to succeed better. Ms. Hatch noted that UMass has the sixth highest number of students living on campus among comparable universities. She said new student housing should avoid creating higher housing costs. Mr. Milligan said that mixed use projects linking campuses and downtowns had been done successfully elsewhere. The community should decide what the project contained.

In response to questions, Mr. Milligan indicated that some campus functions might be included in the project. There were ways through development agreements to ‘lock in’ the nature of the development and the student housing. Mr. Shaffer indicated that design would also drive the kinds of users. He noted that the Town had been approached for some time by firms that develop private student housing, indicating that the market was there. If the ARA had specific concerns about affordability, it could condition the disposition of property.

Ms. Traester said that out-of-state students—a category of student the University was trying to attract—had more disposable income. Ms. Hatch said there were waiting lists for all of the University’s housing options.

The recently demolished graduate student housing complex at the intersection of North Pleasant and Butterfield terrace was discussed. In response to questions, Ms. Hatch and Mr. Milligan indicated that while UMass was open to discussion, it was intending to reserve that property for a ‘gateway’ use—a prominent academic building or a new visitors center. It was not intended to be acquired by the ARA as part of any redevelopment project, but UMass wanted to coordinate its development with the larger project.

Ms. Hatch noted that even if the redevelopment project included substantial new private student housing, UMass would still need more housing. Mr. Milligan indicated that the quality of new housing was a factor in

attracting students. Ms. Hatch noted the need for a parking structure associated with the project, and indicated that a structure of sufficient size could reduce the impact of UMass parking on the downtown parking supply.

There was discussion of the kinds of units students preferred. Ms. Hatch said that surveys had indicated a preference for modest group quarters with shared bathrooms. Students tended not to cook very much. She noted that private developers could build good quality student housing much more cheaply than could the state, which had to abide by complex procurement regulations and high labor costs.

Next Steps

Mr. Coull presented a draft process, which was reviewed. Toward development of the urban renewal plan, he proposed a series of focus group meetings to begin to ‘draw the picture’ of the projects. The ARA discussed spending the next few meetings shaping its process and identifying participants. Mr. Milligan repeated that UMass was only one participant—it was up to the community to decide what it wanted to happen here.

Mr. Hayden referred to the Master Plan process as a model for the public planning process.

Mr. Kelley said that there were some givens. Student housing was one. He asked if UMass had a given number it was considering. Mr. Milligan said that the process should determine the amount of student—there was no set figure. The connection between the campus and the downtown was of equal interest.

Mr. Shaffer said that the project needed to address all of the goals. It had to fit into the site and benefit adjacent properties and neighborhoods. Ms. Seacrest asked the ARA to not forget the needs of the neighborhoods.

Mr. Coull said the Authority needed to better use its website, to inform the community about the project using text and maps, and posting agendas and minutes. Mr. Shaffer and Mr. Tucker said that it could be updated.

Ms. Traester asked if legislation would be needed for the University to convey its property to the ARA. Mr. Milligan said that it would, but that local legislators had been contacted and were supportive.

Ms. Hatch repeated the need for parking to support the project. Mr. Shaffer agreed that parking had to be a component.

ARA members expressed an interest in looking at other examples. Husky Village in CT and Chapel Hill, NC were mentioned.

Mr. Coull said that he and staff would work on the plan and its timelines.

Mr. Hayden said that while this project was the priority, the Authority should keep the other potential projects alive.

Ms. Hardee said the Authority should consider sources of funding to underwrite its efforts. She noted that the Springfield Redevelopment Authority had obtained funds with the assistance of U.S. Representative Richard Neal. Mr. Milligan added that U.S. Representative John Olver’s staff were adept at obtaining transportation-related funding.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for March 24.

Adjournment

Mr. Hayden Moved to adjourn at 8:50 p.m. Mr. Coull seconded, and the Motion passed unanimously (5-0)

Respectfully submitted:

Planning Director

Approved:

ARA Chair